

F Drive North Bridge
(County Park Bridge)
Spanning the Kalamazoo River on F Drive North
Marshall vicinity
Calhoun County
Michigan

HAER No. MI-33

HAER
MICH
13-MARSH,
14-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
Mid-Atlantic Regional Office
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Location: Spanning the Kalamazoo River on F Drive North, located approximately 6-1/2 miles west and 1 mile north of Marshall, Calhoun County, Michigan

UTM: 16.658200.4688000
Quad: Ceresco, Michigan

Date of Construction: 1905

Fabricator: Groton Bridge Company

Present Owner: Calhoun County Road Commission
13300 Fifteen Mile Road
Marshall, Michigan 49068

Present Use: None; closed to all traffic, April 1982

Significance: The F Drive North Bridge (County Park Bridge) is one of a very few early metal through truss highway bridges remaining in the south-central part of Michigan. It was manufactured by the Groton Bridge Company of Groton, New York, a company no longer operating

Project Information: This documentation was undertaken in August 1988 in accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement by the Calhoun County Road Commission as a mitigative measure prior to removal of the bridge.

Gordon F. Karns
County Engineer
Calhoun County Road Commission
Marshall, Michigan

F Drive North Bridge (County Park Bridge), is the site of Emmett Township's first primitive bridge.¹ In 1873, Doc Dickenson owned about 125 acres of land between the Kalamazoo River and the Michigan Central Railroad in section 15 of Emmett Township. The road near his land had been used for highway purposes since circa 1866 but was not officially dedicated as a public road until April 1886.² The 1873 plat map indicates a crossing of the Kalamazoo River in Section 15. It was constructed by Robert Wheaton. This first bridge of wood poles was located across the Kalamazoo River in the area known as White's Station. The area was later known as Wheatfield.³ The earliest written reference to the Doc Dickenson Bridge occurs in 1888.⁴

The 1894 plat map reflects a change of ownership of the Dickenson land to C. H. Merchant. The Emmett Township Board minutes of March 28, 1905, read:

"... Motion made and carried to submit to the voters of Emmett \$1,500.00 for an iron bridge across the river where the Dickenson bridge is now located."⁵

In September 1905, the Township Board minutes read:

"... the township made a very careful examination of the bridge in its various parts and after due consideration the said iron bridge was accepted..."⁶

By 1916, the plat book showed that ownership of the land had changed. Mr. E. M. Fenton owned the largest portion of the land, with a small portion owned by Mr. O. S. Clark. The Fentons and the Clarks owned the land until 1919 when they sold the land to the County Road Commission for use as a public park. The bridge was located on a one-lane road between Battle Creek and Marshall, just south of the Michigan Central Railroad. F Drive North curved through the park to a one-lane masonry tunnel just east of the bridge. This tunnel was the separation between F. Drive North and the Michigan Central Railroad. The bridge continued to be part of the county park until April 1982, when it was closed because of unsafe conditions.⁷

The F Drive North Bridge is a steel, single span Pratt through truss structure, having a timber deck and masonry abutments. This bridge is pin-connected from the truss to the lower chord and has a clear roadway width of 16 feet, a length of 100 feet and, prior to its closures, a posted capacity of 3 tons. The construction of this structure, which replaced an earlier wood bridge, provided the farmers of this area with an improved access to a market for their produce. The only other crossings of the Kalamazoo River were approximately two miles either side of this bridge.⁸

The bridge was manufactured by the Groton Bridge Company of Groton, New York. The company was the oldest industry in Groton, having been established around 1873. At that time, it was known as the Groton Bridge and Manufacturing Company and was owned and operated by Charles Perrigo and Company. About 1899, the American Bridge Company bought the plant and closed it down within a year. The people of Groton believed in the company and bought it, forming a new company called the Groton Bridge Company.⁹ George Perrigo came to Owosso, Michigan, in 1856 from Burdett, New York. He was the State's representative for the Groton Bridge Company. In 1901, Mr. P. C. Storm was

appointed the state agent for the Groton Bridge Company. By 1908, the business was flourishing and the company had bridges in almost every county in Michigan. The business was located at 106 W. Main in Owosso.

ENDNOTES

1. Gardner, Hon. Washington, History of Calhoun County, Michigan, Chicago, Illinois: Lewis Publishing Co., 1913.
2. Illustrated Atlas of Calhoun County, Michigan, Fort Wayne, Indiana: Atlas Publishing Co., 1894.
3. Op Cit, Gardner.
4. Op Cit, Gardner.
5. Proceedings of Town Board Meetings, Emmett Township, Meeting Minutes, 1905.
6. Op Cit, Emmett Township.
7. "Park Bridge Closed Permanently," Enquirer and News, April 30, 1982.
8. Hyde, Charles K., The Lower Peninsula of Michigan: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites and The Upper Peninsula of Michigan: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites (two volumes), U.S. Department of the Interior, 1976.
9. Dykeman, Mrs. Gay, Groton Historical Society, Groton, New York. Telephone Interview. December 15, 1982.